Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 18 Number 8 August 2021

FIELD TRIP: Sunday, 8th August 2021: Damagundam Reserve Forest, Vikarabad. Meeting Point: Mangatrai Pearls, Punjagutta, 5.15AM; NMDC, Masab Tank, 5.30AM; Telangana State Police Academy, 6.00AM. Trip Coordinator: Srikanth Bhamidipati (Mobile: 9738840070) or Gowthama Poludasu (Mobile: 9440910967).

The Damagundam Reserve Forest is a relatively under-explored hotspot, and has recently been in the news due to the sighting of the Blyth's Paradise-flycatcher. It hosts a large number of bird and mammal species, and this promises to be an interesting and productive outing.

This will be a half-day trip. Carry water and breakfast/snacks. Strict Covid protocols will be followed, so please ensure you wear masks, carry a sanitiser and maintain social distancing. Members are requested to wear their Deccan Birders ID cards. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty.

MY QUEST FOR THE HONEYGUIDE
Report: Chopta, Uttarakhand, April 2021

Text & Photos: Col SS Cheema (Retd)

Yellow-rumped Honeyguide

Honeyguides are interesting birds and there are a number of them – ten, to be precise – in the genus *Indicator*. Eight of them found in Africa and two in Asia, of which one species is seen in India.

I had been chasing the Indian species, the Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, for quite some time. I will get on to it after telling this story to start with.

So I wanted to see this bird – like all other birds of the world, I must add! – and had set my mind on it. Every time I visited the Himalayas, I was on a constant lookout – I was waiting for an encounter in Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and, of course, on my last visit to Uttarakhand. Well, to be fair, I had also been looking out for the Honeyguide during my visit to Borneo, although that was the other Honeyguide of Asia – the Malaysian Honeyguide.

But of course, being on a lookout and actually seeing the bird are like the sip and the lip – both close, but it will be when it will be. My visits to Sikkim, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and even Borneo were a washout, and this happened over a period of more than 5 years.

Then came the last birding trip to Chopta in Uttarakhand, squeezed in between the first two Covid lockdowns – and I still had this bird as a target species, along with a dozen others. Our bird guide was absolutely certain that we would see the bird, but in heart of hearts, I was not so sure. The past failures were weighing heavy on my mind, to say the least.

Finally the day arrived, and we walked upstream from the road on the first day at Chopta, to the place where we were to see the bird for sure – like a 100% sure – or so our guide had said!

Well, we waited, scanned the area for any signs at all of the birds – but excepting the huge beehives humming with bees in the far distance on a ledge, there was nothing. There were other birds, and pretty ones too – but a sighting of the Honeyguide was not to be. We waited and scanned the nearby areas for over an hour. But since our destination was still a few hours away, we had no choice but to cut short the chase and, after a small Maggi lunch, we moved on. The disappointment on my face was quite obvious.

A few hours down the road, we stopped again at a place with a cliff in the distance, and the guide told us that we *might* be lucky here, as the Honeyguide was seen at this place also sometimes.

Having missed the bird at a place where it was '100% sure', now hoping to see it at a place where it was sighted 'sometimes' – I was really not very hopeful. Anyway, we stopped at the stream, and all the group members started looking out for some beautiful birds around the stream.

I asked our guide if we could walk along the road to the spot near the beehives, about half a kilometre away. Since the others did not respond enthusiastically, the guide and I decided to move ahead.

Yellow-rumped Honeyguide

As luck would have it, just about 200m ahead, there was a flutter in a tree nearby and both the guide and I let out a shout simultaneously – Honeyguide! I was shaking with excitement and moving my feet barely a few inches at a time to ensure the bird did not fly away. The bird was still not clearly visible, even though we were hearing it and catching the glimpses of it in that tree. I first got one clear shot, and then the bird decided to show more confidence in me.

It perched on to a branch an arm's length away, and was not at all afraid. My heart jumping with joy, I called out to the rest of the team. The bird did not mind my shout at all; they all came rushing over, and the bird was still there, singing in front of all of us. What a day it turned out to be!

Yellow-rumped Honeyguide

The scientific name of the Yellow-rumped Honeyguide is *Indicator xanthonotus*. The first part of the name, *Indicator*, means exactly what it does in English – to indicate. The second part, *xanthonotus*, can be broken into two parts – *xanthous*, meaning yellow, and *~nōtos*, meaning 'backed'. This basically adds up to an indicator bird that has a yellow back – so now we can correlate with the common name, the Yellow-rumped Honeyguide.

The story of the bird is an interesting one and it goes something like this. This bird is known for leading mammals and humans to the bees' hives, enabling the stronger mammal to break open the hive/nest and benefit from the honey, whilst the Honeyguide eats the grubs, bees and the wax. A local (African) superstition demands that some of the honey be left for the Honeyguide, otherwise next time it would lead the searcher towards a hidden snake or leopard! Well, search the Internet and you will find many such videos, but most of them are not proven or verified. All the same, the folklore lives on.

And this is the reason birding is my passion – every bird has a story and every story has a bird!

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photo: Umesh Mani

Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)

Greylag Goose (Little Rann of Kutch, Gujarat, February 03, 2019)

Order: Anseriformes
Family: Anatidae
Genus: *Anser*
Species: *A. anser*
Size: 75-90 cm

Description & distribution: The Greylag Goose is the type species of the genus *Anser*, and the largest Goose species seen in India. It has a rotund, bulky body, with mottled grey and white underparts with some variable black spotting, barred brownish grey and white upperparts with a white line bordering its flanks, and a grey rump and white vent. The neck is long and thick, with prominent 'concertina-ed' folds in the neck feathers, and the grey head is unmarked. The eyes are black with a yellow eye-ring. The fleshy-pink bill is stout and has a white 'nail', which is distinctive. Legs and feet are pink. Wing coverts are light, contrasting with darker flight feathers, and it shows a pale grey forewing in flight. The juvenile is similar to the adult but with less prominent pale fringes to upperparts, flanks and belly.

Two subspecies are recognized: *A. anser anser*, the western Greylag Goose, which breeds in Iceland and northern and central Europe, and *A. a. rubrirostris*, the eastern Greylag Goose, which breeds in Romania, Turkey and Russia east to northeastern China. Some authorities also recognize a domesticated subspecies, *A. a. domesticus*. The subspecies are known to intergrade in areas where their ranges overlap. Males are larger, and this sexual dimorphism is more prominent in the eastern subspecies.

The Greylag Goose breeds across the entire Palearctic region, including Europe and northern Asia. European populations winter in northern Africa and the Mediterranean region, while the Asian populations migrate to Azerbaijan, Iran, Pakistan, northern and central India, Bangladesh and east to China. North America gets occasional vagrants, and Australia and New Zealand both have small, established feral populations.

Habitat & behaviour: In their wintering ranges, the Greylag Goose is gregarious and is usually seen in large flocks, in jheels, rivers and lake sides, as well as cultivated fields, grassland or other arable land. It usually rests during the day and feeds at night in the agricultural fields and wet meadows. Its diet consists primarily of vegetable matter, grass, winter crops like rice, beans or cereals, aquatic weeds and tubers, but they do also consume small fish, amphibians, crustaceans, molluscs and insects. Its call is a loud, cackling *ahngg ung ung*, uttered on ground or in flight, and sometimes a conversational *gay gay gay* while feeding. Interestingly, there are subtle variations in the calls used in different situations, and individual geese seem to be able to identify other known geese by their voices. Goslings utter chirps or light whistles, while adults may also hiss if threatened or angry.

Nesting: The Greylag Goose generally breeds generally between April and June in its breeding range. It forms long-term (mostly life-long) monogamous pair bonds. The nest is built on the ground among heather, rushes, small shrubs or reeds, and is built using pieces of reeds, twigs, grass, moss and heather. The usual clutch consists of 4-6 eggs, initially creamy white but soon turning a stained buff or off-white. Incubation duties are handled by the female, with the male standing guard nearby, but both parents are involved in feeding and care after the birds are hatched.

Local name: The Greylag Goose is known as *'Hans', 'Raj hans', 'Sona'* or *'Karria sona'* in Hindi, *'Raj hans'* in Bengali and Gujarati, *'Tella pedda batu'* in Telugu, *'Kurith-thalayan'* in Malayalam and *'Neer vathu'* or *'Vari kazhutha thara'* in Tamil.

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BIRDING AT THE BARRAGE

Trip Report: Manjeera Wildlife Sanctuary, August 1, 2021

Dr Jairamchander Pingle

Baya Weaver (Photo: Pingle Janardhan Reddy)

On one of my Sunday birding trips I met Rajiv, a fellow birder, who mentioned that one of the good birding spots now is the Manjeera Barrage, and that there was a possibility of seeing the Mottled Wood Owl.

So I asked my cousins Vikram Dev Rao and Janardhan Reddy to join, and we went to Manjeera on August 01, 2021. We reached a birding spot on a bund there, and coincidentally we met Rajiv also there, which made it easier for us.

Grey-headed Swamphen (Photo: Dr Jairamchander Pingle)

Tricoloured Munia (Photo: Dr Jairamchander Pingle)

Pheasant-tailed Jacana (Photo: Pingle Janardhan Reddy)

Red Avadavat (Photo: Dr Jairamchander Pingle)

We were lucky to see the Tricoloured Munias and the Red Munia also. While walking on the bund, we saw several Pheasant-tailed Jacanas. In particular, one bird was sitting quite close to the bund and, when we drew near, it moved away a short distance and stayed in the water close by. We were told that it had been nesting there, and that a floating nest had been seen close to the reeds near the bank of the bund the week before.

To our pleasant surprise, though with great difficulty, we were able to spot the nest with three eggs through the reeds. We did not approach closer, as it would be wrong to disturb them, so I took a few photographs with a long lens and quickly moved away.

We continued with the rest of the trip, looking for the Mottled Wood Owl near the disused area of the water treatment plant. Unfortunately, we could not find it, but were lucky to see a Spotted Owlet in one of the trees.

Spotted Owlet (Photo: Dr Jairamchander Pingle)

Baya Weaver & Zitting Cisticola
(Photo: Dr Jairamchander Pingle)

Anyway, I decided to go back the next week – on Sunday, August 8, 2021 – to see if the eggs had hatched. The mother Pheasant-tailed Jacana was still there; this time, she did the same thing, that is, flying a short distance away from the reeds, but this time she was constantly calling out.

We felt that most likely she was calling out to the chicks, and I was pleasantly surprised to see two little newborn chicks moving around near the reeds. It was difficult to photograph them due to the presence of the reeds, so I kept my distance, sat on the portable stool and patiently waited.

Pheasant-tailed Jacana with chicks
(Photo: Dr Jairamchander Pingle)

When the sun came out, the mother Jacana moved into a clearer area of the lake and kept calling, and finally the chicks moved out a little in the open. I was fortunate to photograph and videograph them along with the constant calling of the mother Jacana.

On reading up a little, I found that interestingly, the male Jacana sometimes carries the chicks under its wings and their long toes hanging down outside may be the only part visible. And happily for me, when I went back and checked my photos, I found that I had actually got a photograph where this phenomenon could be seen!

Pheasant-tailed Jacana with chicks under its wings
(Photo: Dr Jairamchander Pingle)

I felt very lucky that I could make a follow-up visit to see the chicks. I hope they are doing well now.

The full list of sightings during the outing is given below:

Sl No	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*	5	Red Avadavat	*Amandava amandava*
2	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	6	Fulvous Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna bicolor*
3	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*	7	Grey-headed Swamphen	*Porphyrio poliocephalus*
4	Tricoloured Munia	*Lonchura malacca*	8	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*

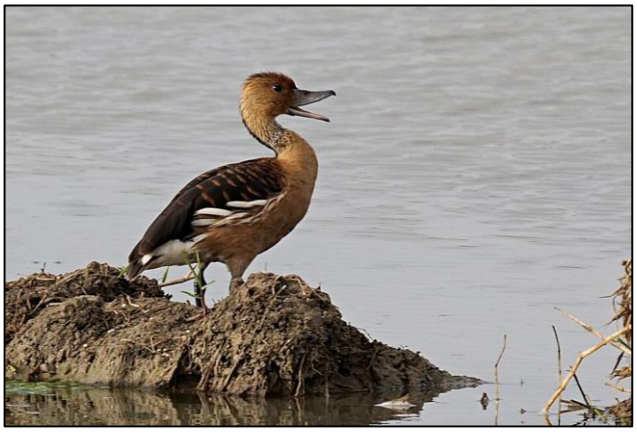
Sl No	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Common Name	Scientific Name
9	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	19	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*
10	Asian Pied Starling	*Gracupica contra*	20	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*
11	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*	21	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
12	Streaked Weaver	*Ploceus manyar*	22	Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*
13	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*	23	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
14	Spotted Owlet	*Athene brama*	24	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*
15	Common Teal	*Anas crecca*	25	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
16	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	*Merops philippinus*	26	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*
17	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	27	Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*
18	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*			

Some other photos taken during the trips:

Black-winged Kite
(Photo: Dr Jairamchander Pingle)

Asian Koel male
(Photo: Dr Jairamchander Pingle)

Purple-rumped Sunbird male
(Photo: Dr Jairamchander Pingle)



Fulvous Whistling-duck (Photo: Pingle Janardhan Reddy)

Tricoloured Munia allopreening (Photo: Pingle Janardhan Reddy)

Ashy Prinia (Photo: Dr Jairamchander Pingle)

Black-headed Ibis (Photo: Dr Jairamchander Pingle)

Pheasant-tailed Jacana with chicks
(Photo: Dr Jairamchander Pingle)

Fulvous Whistling-duck (Photo: Dr Jairamchander Pingle)

Blue-tailed Bee-eater
(Photo: Dr Jairamchander Pingle)

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Bird Humour

Umesh Mani

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